

[William Augustus Bowles]

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Pioneer Experiences

[EDITORIAL FIELD COPY?]

by

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[Uvalde?] COUNTY, DISTRICT #10 [??]

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WILLIAM AUGUSTUS BOWLES

Uvalde, Texas

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W.A. Bowles, commonly known as Gus, resides on North Getty Street in Uvalde and is one of the oldest residents in the county. He is 90 years of age, a Civil War veteran and Uvalde County pioneer.

His wife, who was a daughter of one of the early-day cattlemen of this section is 85 years old and the mother of ten children, eight of whom are still living. She was born in Fort Worth and came to Uvalde County when she was three years old.

These old folk who enjoy the distinctions of being Uvalde's oldest married couple have good memories and are equally in good health. The following story of early life is of Bell and Uvalde Counties:

"I was born in '48 in Mississippi. We came to Texas in '49 and settled in Bell County. I started to school when I was about six or seven years old right there at Belton.

"When the Civil War broke out, my father went to fight. He bought a little place out of Belton and moved us into the country. It was land for cultivation and as I was about 13 years old, it was up to me to keep things going. My father had been gone a long time when some Confederate soldiers camped near our place one day. They had stopped to eat dinner and I went down there where they were to talk to them. They talked about the war til they got me in the notion of going and I went back to the house and told my mother that I was going to the war. She began trying to keep me from going and talking and begging me not to go, but I told her that I would go down to where my father was and I would try to get in the same regiment with him. C.12 - 2/11/41 - Texas

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He was stationed at Houston on Buffalo Bayou and man in Colonel Gillispie's regiment. I walked sixteen miles to get to a train and went on down to Houston and then I walked on down to camp, about two miles. My father was sure surprised to see me and asked me what I was doing there. I told him I was afraid that the war would break before I got to go. Well, he knew I was too young so he went and talked to the colonel. He introduced me and the colonel said he would like to get me to go back home but if I wouldn't go, I could stay there with my father because he couldn't sign me up on account of my age. My father had been down there for a long time, so he talked to the colonel about letting me stay there in his place while he went home. I could take his place till he got back. The colonel agreed and they gave me a suit of clothes and a gun and he says, 'Now, I'll tell you, you are going to find this pretty hard for you have to go up to Houston and guard prisoners two hours two or three times a week.' I said I could stand that all right.

"I was there two or three months and had to go on guard very week, two or three times and I was getting pretty tired of it. We lived on starvation rations. They give us these here old hard-tack crackers and bacon; no coffee. We had to drink water. They couldn't get coffee , for the northern people had it all tied up. The only way we could get a cup of coffee was when we would be on guard. Then we'd go to the coffee house where they served coffee and get a cup.

"I had never wrote to my father to come back, so I stayed there till we got word that Lee's army had surrendered. When we got word that he had surrendered, our colonel said, 'Well, the war is about over.' One day we heard a cannon firing down at Galveston and the colonel and General Magruder said, 'That's Yankees firing on Galveston now and 3 we've got to get in line of battle and prepare to get 'em when they come.' That was the first time I ever was in line of battle and I could look up and down the line and see the guns glistening in the sun and the generals riding up and down in front of the lines giving orders — oh my! I wished I was back home then. They thought the Yankees would come on up to Houston on the train. Along in the evening, we were standing there on that prairie and we seen the

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train coming and heard the whittle. The officers said, 'Well, they're coming; we'll have to fight them!' We got ready and had our guns all ready to fire. When that train come in sight, you never saw so many men in your life. They were all over it. When they got in sight, [they began?] waving their hats and handkerchiefs and cheering and the officers called to us and said the war was over because that was our men on their way home. We all started home that same evening. Our general told us that since the soldier's were going to take Houston, we might as well go on in and get what we could too. They hit that town and went into every store and took everything they wanted. All of those private stores were looted. So I decided I would go in and get me a big gun.

I got two guns and a big box of ammunition that weighed about forty pounds. I had to get somebody to help me pack it out. I got one of the guns for my brother for I knew he would sure be pleased with a good gun as we hunted so much.

"I saw the soldiers packing out bolts of calico and other materials from those stores and I went into one of the stores and got me a bolt and I would start for the door with it, but before I could ever get outside with it, someone else would take it away from me. I wanted to take mama a bolt of it but I couldn't ever get back to my guns and ammunition with any it. I finally quit and didn't try any more.

"We chartered a train from Houston and came out in about sixteen miles 4 of Bryan and it was about fourteen miles to our place. I got with some of the soldiers and come right on and we got some teamsters to bring us on home. It was night when we got out our way. We got in about three miles of my home and I decided to stop at a neighbors neighbor's and leave my guns and ammunition. As it happened, some of my folks were staying all night there that night and I went up there to talk to them and inquire about my folks. They were all glad to see me but my mother already knew that the war was over.

"It was the biggest accident that I wasn't killed that night. The Negroes had been breaking into our house and stealing things out and that very night, my brother had a shot gun fixed

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up so if the door opened, the gun would go off. It was a good trap and would have killed anyone that had opened the door. Of course, that would have been the first thing I would have done. I would have opened the door and gone into the house and of course, the gun would have gone off and killed me.

“My brother was sure proud of that gun. We had plenty of ammunition to shoot all the trees down with. When we couldn't find anything else to shoot at, we shot at the trees. But in about a year, the Yanks came around and took all our guns away from us. That is, they confiscated all the artillery we had used in the war. But they didn't get the ammunition. We had already shot it up.

“I came on out to Uvalde County in 1868. I was 19 years old — not yet twenty. I came out here with my father to see some of his connections and when I got here, I went to work for my uncle, W. B. Bowles, who was known as Dock Bowles. I worked for him twelve mouths and went back and stayed nearly two years. I told him this part of the would was too tough. Men were being killed here all the time and if a sheriff didn't 5 resign, he was killed or run off. While I was gone back home, there was a man come here from Kentucky named Asberry. He was looking for work but got killed. by a desperado named Young. He shot Young too. My uncle guarded the jail that night, because they expected a mob to come there after Young. They had taken the dead man and the wounded man both to jail, but everyone knew that Young was a desperate character and they wanted him out of the way. The trouble came up in my uncle's store. My uncle had hired Asberry and he told him about Young coming into his store and getting anything he wanted and not even paying for it. He told Asberry that if he came in there again to not let him have anything for he wouldn't pay for it. Young came in and got a suit of clothes and Asberry tried to stop him and told him that Mr. Bowles couldn't let him have anything else so Young told him he was grossly insulted and to go get his gun because he was going to kill him. My uncle's store was right where the Kincaid Hotel is now. He had a hotel, store and livery stable. Well, Young came back and they shot it out. Asberry shot Young in the right arm and just shattered it, but Young shot him right in the heart. He died right then and they took both

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of the men over to the jail. When my uncle was on guard that night, a mob came to the jail and went right in and shot Young down while he was sitting beside my uncle. They had all been afraid of Young, he was so mean. And he would kill anybody without any cause.

"I guess I was about 23 or 24 years old when I met my wife here. She was Miss Margaret Thalia McKinney. Her father had a ranch out here on the Nueces. The country was open and he owned worlds of cattle. It took me about a year to get that girl. We had met at a dance but she never got to go to every dance that came along. I had to go to see her a good while. She was born in Fort Worth but her folks came out here when she was little.

"After we were married, we lived in town and I worked at the store till I got in bad health. My father-in-law said he would give me twenty-five acres of land if I would come out there and get well. So I did that and went out and lived till I got my health back.

"We had a little field we wanted to plant but the horses weren't broke to plow and we didn't know what to do. So my wife said she would lead the horse while I plowed. She did, and it worked all right. While she led the horse, I held the plow and walked behind. We raised a good crop too. When I regained my health, I sold the place for \$700 and came back to town. When I come back to town, I went into business with my uncle again. I bought half-interest in the store and he took my note for it. I stayed in with him two years and built a pretty good home then we sold out.

'This was a lawless town in those days. I'll tell you how mean those men were. I worked in that store of my uncle's four years and, as I said before, bought half-interest in the store. When we was partners, I have had six or seven or them desperadoes come into the store at a time. I could always get along with them and called them by their first names. They always liked me. They come in one night and all of them was drunk. We retailed whiskey and sold beer by the bottle. I seen just as soon as they came in the house, about 9 or 10 o'clock, that they were full then. They hollered at me, told me to get behind the counter for they were coming in to get something to drink. Some of them asked for whiskey and some

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for beer. One of the men broke the neck off the bottle of beer and drank it. They were/ there nearly one hour drinking, laughing and telling jokes. One of them said to me, 'Gus, when you get ready to close up, we are going to take you with us tonight.' I asked them why they didn't 7 take their enemies instead of their friends. They said no, they wanted to take me, so I said, 'Well, if I have to go, I have to go.' So I closed up the store and went with them as peaceable as I could. I think some of the men were citizens of this town and had just got with that bunch. I said, 'Well, boy, I'm ready to go. What are you going to do with me?' They said they just wanted me to go with them to shoot up the town and have a little fun. Now, you'd do just what they said or get into trouble. We got half-way across to the dance hall that was used for the court house and they all circled around me and shot their six-shooters off right over my head and I said, 'Boys, be careful. Don't shoot too low.' They said they wouldn't hurt me. Well, we went all over town and shot off all the signs from the business houses and everything that could be shot at. They would have shot out lights if there had been any but as soon as people heard that shooting, they closed their doors and put out their lights. We went around all over town and when we got right opposite my house, about where Hooper's furniture store is now, I said, 'Boys, I've had fun enough. I want to stop.' They said, 'We haven't.' But I told them then there was where I lived and my wife was always uneasy when I didn't come in earlier than this and that I could see a light in the house and knew she was scared about me. They went with me to the gate and saw that I went in. But they let me off. I got up by daylight next morning and went on down to the store. Along about 9 o'clock in the morning, all those men came walking in at the door and hollered at me. They said they wanted to pay for their damages the night before. They said they had the money to pay for all their drinks and wanted to know the amount. I figured up their bill the best I could and they paid every cent of it. I set up the drinks to them and they went on off. They hadn't ever gone to bed, but they 8 were sober when they come down that morning.

"One night when I was sleeping at the store, I come in about 9 or 10 o'clock and went to bed and after awhile, Allison Blakeney come in and went to bed too. He was a school

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teacher who stayed down there with me and married my wife's sister later on. I heard a crowd coming in and I could tell they was full. They come in and turned the cover down on my bed and said they were looking for a man named Blakeney. They said they were hunting him because he had come to a Mexican dance down there where they were and while they were dancing with these Mexican girls, Blakeney come around to all of them with a little notebook and pencil and asked each man how tall he was and finally he told them why he was doing this was because there was going to be a killing before morning and he wanted to get their measure.

“They all jumped for their guns and he lit out down where I was. So while they were looking for him, they were telling me that they were going to show him how to have a little fun. They had a rope in their hands and they turned down the cover on his bed and got him. They made him get up and they told him they were going to hang him. He told them he was only playing a joke on them and never meant any harm at all. But they said they were grossly insulted and were going to hang him. They took him barefooted outside to a hackberry tree in about fifteen feet of the door. Then they got an empty drygoods box and stood him up on it. They got out their pocket knives and began trimming his toenails off into the quick with him begging and hollering for them to quit. He sure did beg but they kept on cutting. Then one of them got up in the tree and out on the limb they were intending to put the rope across to hung him and the limb broke with the fellow. Out he come and he got a pretty hard fall. They all run to him for they thought it had killed him at first, and during the 9 confusion, Blakeney got away. That limb breaking probably saved his life, though I will always believe they would have cut the rope after they kicked the box out from under him.

“Oh, we had no law or order in this town till Henry Baylor was elected sheriff. Henry Baylor's father, General John R. Baylor, was a killer himself and a fearless man. But he didn't kill men without reason. He told me one time that they had better not hurt Henry Baylor. He'd get 'em if they did. Everybody know that General Baylor meant every word he

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said. It may have been the cause of Henry's success too for he held that office twenty-two years.

"After I sold out my interest in the store to my uncle, I went into the hotel business. We rented the building from Mrs. Black and it was called the Central Hotel. We were there about two years but we sold out after our little girl died there and we bought a ranch on the Nueces which got to be known as the old Bowles ranch. That big mountain on the other side of the bridge going to Fort [Clark?] was called the Bowles Mountain. We raised a lot of cattle and a big drought hit us and I sold out our cattle for five dollars and a-half a head after paying twenty-five dollars a round for them. I bought a place on this side of the river and went into the goat business. We handled cattle too but we always made more money off of goats. We had about a thousand head of goats and one night a cold, wet northern hit and took about six-hundred head. We had about four-hundred left. Soon after that, two of our boys bought a bunch of Mexican goats while they were working at Schwartz' store. These Mexicans came along and wanted to buy a lot of goods but they didn't have the money. They wanted to trade these goats so the Old Man Schwartz asked the boys if they would like to take them. They brought them out to us and told us if we would take them and care 10 for them they would give us one-third. There were only about [forty?] or fifty head of them — just common Mexican goats — but we [?] the goats and finally sold them to [?] for \$1,768.

"We have eight living children, five boys and three girls. They are Mrs. [?], Mrs Mabel Guyon, Mrs Celestial Stevens and [?????]; Everett of Pecoe City; Perry of Big [?]; [???] and Arthur of Uvalde. All of them were born in Uvalde.

"We celebrated our golden wedding anniversary December [26?], [?]. [We are reasonably healthy?] and get around all right. We didn't have a real anniversary celebration last year, which was our sixty-fifty but [?????], we'll have one then for it's seldom you see a couple who have lived together seventy years. [On [?? wedding day?], I told my fiends that I wished I could live [????].

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